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**CLASSIC PAGAN REFERENCES
TO
NASCENT CHRISTIANITY**

JOHN ROBERT BRAUER



A STUDY OF THE
CLASSIC PAGAN REFERENCES
TO
NASCENT CHRISTIANITY

A THESIS
FOR THE
DOCTORATE OF PHILOSOPHY

PRESENTED TO

*THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
OF THE NEW YORK UNIVERSITY*

BY

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1906
BALDWIN PRESS, JERSEY CITY.
310 Baldwin Avenue.

BRITISH
MUSEUM

NO. 111111
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F O R E W O R D .

In publishing this dissertation I most thankfully acknowledge my obligations to the authorities of New York and Columbia Universities and of Union Theological Seminary for the privilege of unrestricted research in their libraries; also to Mr. F. Rechten of Jersey City for his valuable service. To Dr. W. Waters, whose stimulating lectures on Greek archæology and religion helped to give me a saner judgment of matters bearing on this thesis, and, especially, to Dr. E. G. Sihler, "doctissimo et venerabilissimo," my teacher, who first suggested the subject of this study, ever braced me by his kind encouragement, and, all in all, proved more than friend to me. I here inscribe my sincere gratitude. Finally, may I be permitted to say that the gentle inspiration which carried my spirit through days and nights of toil in the autumn and winter of 1905-6 came to me from my cherished companion and wife, without whose self-sacrificing devotion to high ideals of thought and life this study could never have been begun nor successfully completed.

J. R. B.

GRACE ENGLISH LUTHERAN CHURCH.

Jersey City, Dec. 29, 1906.

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL SURVEY.

PRIMARY SOURCES.

The earliest¹ references to nascent Christianity are to be found in the works of TACITUS, who lived at the time when the attention of pagan Rome was directed upon the Christians. Upon specific data in his writings² and in the epistles of the younger Pliny,³ the year of his birth is fixed at 55 A.D. Beginning life with the accession of Nero (54-68), under whom the first violent persecution⁴ (a. 64) swept over the church, he witnessed, as a boy, the terrible events of 69, passed through the 15 gloomy⁵ years of Domitian's reign (81-96), and died as late as 120 A.D.⁶ Under Trajan⁷ he held the consulate. He was the greatest literary man of his time, an eloquent pleader,⁸ a master in psychological observation,⁹ a stylist of singular charm, the last great classic¹⁰ of Roman literature. As an historian he is "a descriptive writer of history rather than an historian of research".¹¹ The "Historiae," a narrative of contemporary events from Galba to Domitian inclusively (69-96), were written under Trajan¹² and originally published in 14 (perhaps 12) books, of which the first four and the first half of the fifth have come down to us. The fifth book contains a description of Palestine and the Jews, their customs, the fall of Jerusalem under Titus, etc. Of the "Annales," originally published in sixteen or eighteen books, we have the first four, parts of the fifth and sixth, and, with gaps, books eleven to sixteen. In the fifteenth book of this

¹ Baur, Gesch. derdrei erst. Jahr. 1, p. 431.

² Tac. dial. 2.

³ Pliny, Ep. 7, 20, 3 (Pliny born 61).

⁴ Tac. An. 15, 44.

⁵ Tac. Hist. 1, 1.

⁶ Teuffel Hist. of Roman Lit. par. 333.

⁷ Pliny Ep. 2, 1, 6.

⁸ Idem Ep. 2, 1, 6; 11, 17.

⁹ An. 4, 3. Agr. 42. H. 1, 56.

¹⁰ Teuffel par. 333.

¹¹ Id. 333, 11.

¹² H. 1, 1.

work is the vivid account of the burning of Rome under Nero (64) and the first great persecution. The judgment here rendered by Tacitus upon the Christians may be considered typical of the general attitude¹ of cultured Romans toward the new sect in the reign of Trajan.

The younger PLINY (62-e. 113) was the friend and eminent contemporary² of Tacitus. He held offices under Domitian, the consulate under Trajan (a. 100). The latter gave him the governorship of Bithynia³ and Pontus, held perhaps from September, 111, till January, 113. His letters were published in nine books, to which are added, as a tenth, his letters to Trajan. The emperor's rescripts are usually given. Letters 15-121 are of the time of his Bithynian service. Among these we have his enquiry⁴ of Trajan (X, ep. 96 and 97) concerning the treatment of Christians in his province and the emperor's edict. These documents are of great historical value. The information is reliable, and light is shed on many sides of the life of Christians in this Asiatic province.

SUETONIUS, whom Pliny, his contemporary, calls "probissimum, honestissimum, eruditissimum virum,"⁵ was an advocate and writer under Trajan, for some time private secretary to Hadrian,⁶ and later devoted his life to encyclopaedic studies in the manner of Varro. He died about 160. In his "vitae duodecim imperatorum" (from Caesar to Domitian) are three references to the Christians, resp. Claudius 25, Nero 16, Vespasian 4 (Titus 4, 5.).

EPICTETUS,⁷ the eminent Stoic philosopher, was born at Hierapolis in Phrygia and was manumitted and given the opportunity of a philosophical training by Epaphroditus, the grammaticus of Chaeronea,

¹ Baur. Gesch. d. d. e. J. 1. p. 376.

⁵ Pliny Ep. ad. Traj. 94.

² Ep. 9, 23, 2,

⁶ epistolarum magister.

³ Ep. 10, 109.

⁷ Christ. Geschichte d. griech.

⁴ Ad. Traj. ep. 96.

Lit. par. 441, 458 v. 3.

who was a friend of Josephus.¹ Banished, with other eminent philosophers, from Rome by the decree of Domitian² (a. 94), he went to Nicopolis in Epirus and taught with great success up far into the second century. Arrian, his pupil and the Xenophon of later Greek literature, wrote down the discourses of his teacher (*διατριβαὶ Ἐπικτῆτος* in 8 books, 4 of which are extant, and *ἐνχειρίδιον*) and published them after his death. Whether by personal contact or otherwise, Epictetus knew the customs of the Jews and Christians and refers to them several times in the *διατριβαῖ*.

LUCIAN was born at Samosata about 125³ and flourished at the time of the Antonines. He was a prolific writer, a satirist of rare literary charm. Eighty-two of his works, written mostly in dialogue form, not all authentic, are extant. He has been called the Voltaire of the second century. Among many glimpses of a world moved "under the impulse of a complex of forces" is one also of Asiatic Christendom. References to Christians have been found in various writings, especially his "Peregrinus." In the "Alexander" (ch. 25-38) we have a miracle-monger, preying on the stupidity of the Christians in Cappadocia. Allusions to the Christians are found by some in the "Philopseudes" c. 16, wherein Baur⁴ sees a reference to Jesus and the practice of exorcisms, and in the "True Story" 2, 4, 11, 12, which contains the pretty sketch of the ή πόλις πᾶσα χρυσῆ (Cf. Rev. 21; 22). Both of these may be otherwise accounted for, especially the former, since the practice of exorcisms was quite common in Palestine. Cf. Matt. 8,28; 12,27 Luke 9,49 Acts 8,9; 13,6; 19,13. The account of the death of Peregrinus, written about 166 and addressed to Lucian's friend Kronios, is "one of the most curious documents of that age"⁵. Chapters 11-16 deal more or less with the Christians. Per-

¹ Suetonius, Dom. 10.

² Gildersleeve, Essays and Studies, p. 315, gives 120.

³ Ibidem, p. 347.

egrinus, after a life of dissipation¹. joins the Christians in Syria and imposes on them, until he is detected and rejected. He ends his life by self-immolation. Peregrinus is historical. He seems to have lived under Antonius Pius, 138-161 A.D., and was burned, according to Keim's² calculation, in the summer of 165, the fifth year of Marcus Aurelius. The "Philopatris," a dialogue between a Christian and a Pagan, was formerly attributed to Lucian. It makes the Christians (*ἀεροβατοῦντας* c. 24) the object of much scorn. This work is manifestly spurious. Gessner assigned it to the age of Julian, c. 363 A.D.; Gutschmied³ puts it still later—623. The ridicule directed by it against the dogma of the trinity forces the assumption that it was written after the council of Nicaea, 325 A. D. It was probably written in imitation of Lucian⁴ and need not concern us here.

CLAUDIUS GALENUS was one of the most learned and prolific writers of the ancient physicians. In point of style and of exact research, he never attained⁵ eminence, coming rather under the class of physicians who, living in the time of Hadrian and the Antonines, gave themselves to popular philosophizing. He was born about 131 A. D. at Pergamos, and died at Rome about 201. He lived and moved much in the territory of the primitive churches. At Smyrna, Korinth, Alexandria, he pursued studies and practised in Rome up to his death. Though not in sympathy with the philosophical side of Christianity, nor with its exclusive positivism, his brief reflections upon Christians seem unbiassed, commendatory in spirit and contrariwise; they are based upon some personal contact with the people. We find these judgments in books 1 and 2 of *de diff. pulsuum*, also in his commentary⁵ on the *Timaeus* of Plato.

¹ Gellius 12:11 calls P. vir gravis
et constans.

² Acc. to Euseb. Chron.

³ Christ p. 489, n. 3.

⁴ Neander C. H. II., 89.

⁵ Christ par. 463 and 583.

⁶ Gieseler I., p. 122.

LAMPRIDIUS, whose life falls into the last part of the third and the first part of the fourth century, leads us into the more advanced stage of Catholic Christianity. He was one of the six “scriptores historiæ augustæ,”¹ embracing the lives of the emperors Hadrian to Numerianus (117-284). To him the biographies of Commodus, Diadumenus, Elagabalus, and Alexander Severus are attributed. The life of Alexander Severus chiefly concerns us. Lampridius shows us this emperor’s peculiar attitude (essentially syncretistic) to Christianity with considerable detail. In this collection of biographies, the lives of Hadrian and Septimius Severus, of whom some edicts respecting the Christians are preserved, were handed down under the supposed authorship of Aelius Spartianus.

DIO CASSIUS, the foremost Greek historian² of the imperial era, was born about 150, at Nicæa in Bithynia. Retiring from political activity early after attaining some rank, he devoted himself chiefly to historiography. His Roman history comprised 80 books, beginning with *Æneas* and running up to Alexander Severus (a. 229). Since books 36-60 (68-47 A.D.) only are directly preserved, we are for our subject dependent upon an abridgment of his work made by Xiphilinus, a monk of Constantinople, in the 11th century. The Jewish war, under Vespasian, is described in the 76th book; the Christians are mentioned casually in the 67th and 68th books.

LIBANIUS of Antioch was born 314. His contemporaries sometimes called him “the minor Demosthenes.” About 344 he kept a school in Nicomedia on the Pontus,³ but transferred it later to Constantinople, and still later to Antioch. All his sympathies were on the Greek side of life. He loved the Greek gods and would not fall in with the tendency of the times to turn away from the pagan mytholo-

¹ Teuffel par. 392, 402.

² Christ par. 443.

³ Christ par. 542, 543.

gies. This disposition in him explains his admiration for Julian, the restorer of paganism, who had been his pupil. When Chrysostomos, another of his pupils, adopted Christian beliefs, he felt deeply grieved, for he¹ would gladly have made Chrysostomos his successor in the school. Libanius was an industrious writer. Besides the rhetorical writings he wrote many letters, some to Christian bishops and scholars. 1607 are preserved. Julian's relation to the church is dwelt on in his monody on Julian's death, held 363 A.D. The speech for the preservation of the temples (*ὑπὲρ τῶν ιερῶν*), addressed to Theodosius the Great sometime between 384 and 391, reveals the conditions obtaining in the struggle of paganism for self-preservation.

AMMIANUS MARCELLINUS was born about 330 at Antioch and died about 400. Early he entered the army, accompanied the magister equitum Ursinius to Italy and Gaul, fought under Julian against the Alemanni, and took part in the Persian expedition a. 353. Later he lived in Antioch and in Rome. His "rerum gestarum" in 31 books, the first 13 of which are lost, is an impartial² and fairly accurate chronicle of events from Nerva (96) to Valen (398). It is in part the history of his own time. He gives us an insight into the time of the Arian controversies, especially of the history of Constantius³ (+ 361 A.D.), also of the life of Julian. He remained a firm believer in polytheism,³ in prodigia, etc., but was fair in his remarks about Christianity.

EUNAPIUS⁴ was born at Sardes in Lydia about 348. He wrote a history of Claudius II (270) up to Theodosius (403), also a series of biographies of philosophers and sophists. Photius says that his history (now lost) was favorable to Julian and hostile to the Christian emperors. This statement is confirmed by the extant fragments from his lives of the later sophists.

¹ Sozomen H. 8, 2.

² Teuffel par. 429.

³ Am. 14, 11, 25—Also 21, 16, 18.

⁴ Christ par. 587, 591.

S E C O N D A R Y S O U R C E S .

The writers thus far reviewed dealt with the Christians merely casually. The only exception that might reasonably be made is Lucian, who, when we take into account his generally sceptical attitude toward all religions, may have written his "Peregrinus"¹ with an antagonistic purpose. The writers now to be considered dealt professedly with the Christian religion by way of literary opposition. No large bibliography could be constructed. There never were many writers of this class, and the literary remains of those that wrote are but fragmentarily transmitted to us. Toward the fourth century, the custom of destroying the books of heretical writers established itself. Constantine in 325 burned the writings of Arius. In 435 the works of Nestorius were confined to the flames. In 448 all the obtainable literature of anti-christian authors was confiscated and destroyed by a decree of the emperors Theodosius II. and Valentinian² II. The law was directed chiefly against the works of Porphyrius, but included Celsus and others. What we can know of all this literature must be gleaned and reconstructed from the citations in the Christian fathers; especially in Origen, Eusebius, Cyril of Alexandria (for Julian), and minor notices in Jerome and Augustin.

The first important literary effort on the Christian religion was probably the oration of Marcus Fronto of Citra,³ the famous orator of the time of the Antonines (150-160). From him Caecilius in the "Octavius" of Minucius Felix may be supposed to have drawn his catalogue of the crimes that were so often imputed to Christians. The speech of Fronto is lost, unfortunately; and if we had it, it would probably

¹ Per. c. 11-16 (written 169).

² Schaff C. H. v. II.

³ M. Felix Oct. 9, 13. Euseb. IV., 6. Teuffel H. R. L. p. 355.

be the most compact statement of pagan antitheses, reflecting the attitude of a time when paganism had not* yet absorbed Christian views and elements.

C E L S U S.

Though we must content ourselves to have lost all of this oldest literary assault, we may be grateful for the great service of the industrious and learned Origen (185 A.D.—c. 255), who, in his refutation of Celsus, (*κατὰ Κέλσου [τοῦ ἀθεοτάτου]* 8 books) preserved for posterity, in almost complete form, “ein volles heidnisches Buch tieferer Ueberlegungen ueber das Christentum,”¹ the oldest extant and most complete pagan effort to combat the new religion. A modern critical student of Celsus like Keim estimates the literary and historical value of Celsus thus: “Wir Heutigen koennen kaum darueber zweifeln, dass die Schrift des Celsus, schon nach ihrem absoluten schriftstellerischen Werth bemessen, trotz mannigfacher formeller and materieller Maengel, durch Darstellungsgabe and philosophisch-kritischen Scharfsinn den hervorragenderen Produkten der spaeteren griechischen Literatur angehoert and in Anbetracht ihrer ernsten Beschaeftigung mit den groessten religioesen Zeitfragen sogar vielleicht in die erste Linie zu stellen ist.”² * * * Origen undertook the task of preparing

¹ Keim p. 79.

³ cf. The Pref. to Origin's c. C.

² Keim p. 177.

⁴ Orig. Pref.

* Celsus (c. 178) already commanded Christian terminology, for he speaks familiarly of the “kingdom,” of the “Son,” “Son of Man,” “Salvation,” “temptation,” “flesh,” “spirit,” “resurrection,” etc. Porphyrius acc. to Euseb. praep 4, 7 used the phrase *σωτηρίᾳ ψυχῆς*.

* * * J. Geffen in “Aus der Werdezeit des Christentums” p. 84 says of Celsus’ book: “Trotzdem sie auch frueher Gesagtes gelegentlich wiederholt, muss man sie eine entschieden wissenschaftliche nennen, weil sie von grossen Gesichtspunkten ausgeht.” 1904.

his apology, in which he quotes from the original book of Celsus (*λαθγος ἀληθής*) very fully, at the ripe age of 63 and upon the urgent request¹ of the eminent Ambrosius. Origen himself hardly deemed² the books of Celsus worthy of a refutation; Ambrosius certainly did. Historians from Neander up have given increasing attention to him. Neander¹ said: "Es ist um desto notwendiger, dass wir den Charakter, die Ansichten and die Argumentationsweise dieses Mannes etwas naeher betrachten, da wir ihn in vielfacher Hinsicht als den Vorlaeufer vieler spaeteren Gegner des ganzen Christentums, oder der eigentuemlichen Grundlehren desselben ansehen koennen, da sein Geist und Sinn sich nachher oft wiederfindet, und es sich bei ihm oft recht anschaulich zeigt, wie evangelische Wahrheiten dem natuerlichen Menschen von dessen Standpunkt aus erscheinen muessen." Bauer also recognizes the importance of Celsus by giving an excellent resumé of the thought of Celsus in his history. The scope of Celsus' reading was almost universal. He was familiar with the Greek poets and historians, and the various systems of the philosophers; he had some knowledge of the customs of distant nations; he could marshal facts from nature, from music, from magic, from prophecy, and, like Plutarch, was quite conversant with the history of religion in its various forms. This boast *πάντα γὰρ οἶδα* (1, 12) was, indeed, not without basis. His exact knowledge of the Christian beliefs, dogmas and their historical sources he obtained from the documents¹ themselves: the Old Testament and at least one (perhaps Matthew) of the synoptic gospels [*παῦτα μὲν οὖν ὑμῖν ἐκ ὑμετέρων συγγραμμάτων* 2, 13-2, 49]. If the mind of the real Celsus can be recognized from the books of Origen, we are led to believe that his many-sided knowledge lacked co-ordination. Origen himself complains of frequent contradictions and repetitions. (Cf. his

¹ 2, 13.

rejection of Christ-worship and defense of demon-worship, 7, 68-8, 15.) Despite these defects, the book of Celsus shows us the early beginnings of many tendencies of thought and speculation, often represented as distinctly modern discoveries. Here we meet the germ-thoughts of all modern biblical criticism, both from the philosophical and historical sides; here is the Stoical antecedent of our conception of divine immanence; here are glimpses of our current nature philosophy and evolution; here is the first compendium of the science of comparative religion. The book of Celsus is, therefore, quite fundamental for the later anti-christian literature, and the writers after Celsus, especially Porphyrius (c.270), Hierocles (305), the pagan Caecilius in the "Octavius" of Minucius Felix, added no essentially new thoughts to the literature.

Since the work of Celsus no longer lies before us in its original form, any attempt to re-construct the original arrangement can be merely tentative. The fact that Origen has eight books in his refutation was formerly taken as a basis for the opinion that Celsus also had written his *λόγος ἀληθής* in eight books.¹ But this theory is long abandoned. Later, a twofold division, comprising first the attack from the Jew's standpoint, secondly from Celsus' own point of view, was accepted. Thus Neander and others. Some have analyzed the work according to its argument against Christianity from history and from philosophy. Origen himself in the preface² to his work complains of a lack of order and of frequent repetitions in the book of Celsus. Some indications of an original plan in Celsus' book occur in the first and second books of Origen's refutation. The most ingenious and thorough analysis, or reconstruction, of the original parts and subdivisions of Celsus was furnished by Keim. According to him, Celsus began with

¹ Thus the Christian scholiast to Lucian's *Pseudomantis*. Pref. 1, 40; 2, 32.

a prologue, sketching the general terms, the character of Christianity, and lamenting the schismatic tendency of both the Jews and Christians over against the harmonious character of the pagan religions. Origen's first and second books contain part one of Celsus' book, in which the Jew, representing his race and religion, advances his polemics against Christianity. The following three books of Origen are then supposed to have comprised Celsus' personal attack made from philosophy, in Celsus the second part. The third part, reflected in books 5-7 of Origen, may have reviewed the special dogmas of the religion in the light of current philosophy; if so, this was probably the most important section of the treatise. The remaining parts of Origen's seventh and eighth books may have formed a kind of 4 section in Celsus, wherein this author sought a common ground for a reconciliation of the Christians with his own views. Whatever one may think of this disposition, the fact that by it all co-related fragments in Origen have been, with much critical acumen, brought together and properly focused, may be commended.

We are indebted to Keim also for the most searching study to fix the identity of our Celsus. The name Celsus occurs over 200 times in the literature of the first three centuries. Origen himself seems to have reached no positive conviction on this question. He knew of two philosophers of Epicurean persuasion by this name, one of the time of Nero, another of Hadrian's time (1.8), the author of some books against magicians (1, 68.) Lucian¹ was familiar with a contemporary writer of *συγγράμματα κατὰ Μάγων*, and probably dedicated his Alexander to him, which he wrote under Commodus (180-192). Keim, in agreement with Origen, ably defends the identity of our Celsus with the friend of Lucian, though Christ doubts it. It is difficult to fix the

¹ Alex. 21.

philosophical persuasion with definiteness. Origen held him to be an Epicurean, who, for the sake of literary expediency, put on the cloak of a¹ Platonist. Both Mosheim² and Keim³ regard him as a Platonist. He must have written in the latter half of the second century, for he recognizes the existence of the Gnostic sects, also the Marcionites. Keim,⁴ therefore, fixes the time of the writing in the summer of 178 A.D.

HIEROCLES.

The last literary antagonist of Christianity of purely pagan environment was Hierocles.⁵ While governor first of Bithynia, where the younger Pliny, under Trajan, had dealt with the Christians, and later of Alexandria under Diocletian, Hierocles was personally interested in instigating the persecution of his time. He wrote either during or immediately after the Diocletian persecution, probably from 305-310 A.D. His *λόγοι φιλαλήθεις πρὸς τοὺς Χριστιανούς* was destroyed by the emperors to whom we must ascribe the destruction of the works of his predecessors; but we still possess sections of this work and enough detail to know the scope of the books, the drift of the argument, and the subject matter from the refutation by Eusebius (*contra Hieroclem*), which is extant. Lactantius⁶ ascribes to Hierocles wide reading and much familiarity with the Christian views, "Adeo multa intima enumerans, ut aliquando ex eadem disciplina fuisse videatur." But Hierocles added nothing essentially new to the arguments advanced by

¹ V C. Cels. I, 8.

² Praef. to his translation of Origen p. 22.

³ Keim p. 203.

⁴ Ib. p. 267.

⁵ Christ par. 474; 610.

⁶ Div. Inst. v. 2, 3, also de mort. pers. c. 16.

Celsus or Porphyry. He had divided his book into two parts, the first dealing with a parallel between Appollonius of Tyana and Jesus, the second dealing with the current objections to Christianity. Eusebius gives attention chiefly to the attempted parallel.

Philostratos by request of Julia Domna, the gifted Syrian wife of Septimius Severus, wrote a life of the far-famed Pythagorean philosopher and magician Appollonius of Tyana in Cappadocia, to whom Caracalla raised a monument, whom Alexander Severus honored by setting his image in the Imperial chapel by the side of Abraham, Christ, and Orpheus, to whom Aurelian also consecrated statues and temples. We shall consider the apologetic significance of Philostratos' idealization of Apollonius, who had died about 100 years previous to the writing, in a later part of this study. Be it sufficient here to state that no parallel between Jesus and Apollonius seems to have been intended by Philostratos, though Julia Domna may have had such a parallel in mind. It was Hierocles who first gave literary expression to the conscious craving of the pagan world of that time to possess an ideal man to be placed in opposition to the Christians' Christ.

P O R P H Y R I U S .

Later than Celsus by 100 years, more incisive in his criticism, and more generally feared was the Neoplatonist Porphyrius. Eusebius calls him *τῶν πάντων δυσμενέστατον καὶ πολεμιώτατον Ἐβραῖων τε καὶ ἡμῶν*. Rufinus² (died 410 A. D.) confirms this statement, saying, "Porphyrius qui specialis hostis Christi est, qui religionem Christianam, quantum in se fuit, subvertere conatus est scriptis suis". Augustin³ readily concedes his learning, calling him *doctissimus philosophorum*.

His learning and his interests were many-sided. Eusebius⁴ gives him this tribute: “*ὁ γενναῖος φιλόσοφος, ὁ θαυμαστὸς θεόλογος, ὁ τῶν ἀπορρήτων μυστής.*” We are not surprised, therefore, that his writings called forth refutations from some of the most eminent churchmen of the time, particularly from Methodius of Tyre, Eusebius of Caesarea, from Philostorgius, and the best of them from Apollinaris of Laodicea. The law of the Byzantine emperors Theodosius II and Valentinian III, which was promulgated Feb. 16, 448 A.D., was directed to destroy particularly the works of Porphyrius, which end was accomplished.

The data of his life are accessible. Born as a Phoenician at Tyrus about 233, he received the name Malchos (Melek), which his later admirers translated into *Βασιλεὺς*, suggesting thereby the name he later assumed: Porphyrius. Some assert that his training was begun by Origen, and that he was an apostate from Christianity.⁵ (Doubted by Gieseler p. 174). At Athens, he attended the school of Longinus, coming in 262 under the Neoplatonic influence of Plotinus at Rome, whose foremost pupil he was. For some time he sojourned in Sicily. Returning to Rome he created a school, teaching philosophy, grammar and rhetoric, but excelling chiefly as an author and popularizer of his eminent teacher's philosophical tenets. A number of his works have come down to us. He was a very religious man, as appears from the lofty sentiments in his letter to his wife Marcella; Christianity he opposed on philosophical grounds, though he did not wholly reject it.

His work *Kατὰ Χριστιανῶν* in 15 books, created much discussion at the time and was met by the refutation of Apollinaris in 30 books. He endeavored to point out contradictions between the Old and New

¹ H. E. 6, 19.

⁴ Praep. Ev. 5, 10 (3, 6).

² Invect. adv. Hiern.

⁵ Christ. G. G. Lit. Sec. 560.

³ Civ. Dei 19, 22, 23.

⁶ Aug. Civ. Dei 10, 28.

Testaments, also among the Apostles themselves. He was one of the first to make a distinction between the religion of Jesus and the interpretations of the religion and person of Jesus by the apostles. Better known is his "Philosophy of Oracles" (*Περὶ τῆς ἐκ λογίων φιλοσοφίας*), containing a few oracles concerning Jesus and the religion. Both of these works (as also the refutation of Apollinaris) are lost. Of the second book, considerable fragments are preserved in the 12 sermonib.
curat. affect.¹ by Theodoret, in Augustin's *de Civ. Dei*, and espec.
in Eusebius' *Praep. Evang.* and *Demonstr. Ev.*

M I N U C I U S F E L I X .

We cannot close this survey without taking into account the Latin apologist Minucius Felix, author of the apologetic dialogue "Octavius," as it were, a tertiary source for this study. He was, at first, hostile to the Christians' cause, not admitting² the Christians to a hearing in the courts; but, as he later with his friend Octavius Januarius, in memory of whom the dialogue was written, became reconciled to the new thought—as it seems, on philosophical grounds,—he sought to commend³ Christianity to the higher circles of Roman society, in which he freely moved. From his own statement⁴ that he took advantage of the court holidays (sane et ad vindemiam feriae iudiciariam curam relaxaverant) to spend a few days at the baths near Ostia, we conclude that he was, by profession, a pleader on the forum. Lactantius⁵ says, "Ex iis, qui mihi noti sunt Minucius Felix non ignobilis inter causidicos loci fuit". To the support and defense

¹ Neander i, 1, p. 177.

⁴ Ibid. 2.

² Oct. 28, 3.

⁵ Inst. Div. 5, 1. Cf. Oct. 1, 3.

³ Ibid. 1.

of his new persuasion he brings classical learning, great skill in argumentation, definite knowledge of the pagan views of his day regarding the Christian life.

The date of his writing is in dispute. The dialogue presupposes the attack of M. Cornelius Fronto, the teacher of M. Aurelius. Fronto died about 166, under Commodus; he may have delivered his speech between 150 and 160, under Hadrian or Antoninus. He is twice named in the dialogue, once by Caecilius Natalis,¹ "Id etiam Cirtensis [where some suppose also Minucius to have been born] nostri testatur oratio", once also by Octavius,² "Sic de isto et tuus Fronto..... testimouium fecit". That also the book of Celsus was in the hands of Minucius, Keim³ has by abundant proof conclusively demonstrated. Much discussion formerly centered upon the question whether Tertullian in his *Apologeticum* had used Minucius or Minucius had used Tertullian. Jerome, in *de viris illustribus* 58, placed Tertullian earlier than Minucius, but Jerome is, in chronological questions, not always a safe guide.⁴ Lactantius, an older and more reliable authority on this point, gives priority to Minucius.⁵ The proofs are cogent that Tertullian, and his pupil Cyprian in his transcription of Octavius in his *de vanitate idolorum*, both based their works upon Minucius. We may, with Keim, place the Octavius in the time of M. Aurelius (about 180), when Fronto's speech was, undoubtedly, still circulated and read. As Origen preserved for us the substance of Celsus' book, Minucius Felix, we trust, gave us in the Octavius the gist of Fronto, the oldest literary assailant of Christianity.

The form⁶ of the dialogue is modeled after Cicero's dialogue "de

¹ Oct. 9, 6.

² Ibid. 31, 2.

³ Celsus p. 157.

[143, n. 1.]

⁴ Cf. his *Chron. of the life of Lucilius* commented upon in Teuffel par.

⁵ Div. Inst. 5, 1 Comp. also Oct. 21, 4 with Tertullian Apol. 10.

⁶ Teuffel par. 368, note 2.

natura deorum.'’ Minucius makes an excursion from Rome to Ostia to enjoy the sea-baths with his friend Octavius Januarius, who also was converted to Christianity. Strolling along the beach, they met Caecilius Natalis, another friend of Minucius, but still a heathen. At the suggestion of Caecilius, they agree to discuss the religious question of the time. Minucius himself is to be the arbiter. Caecilius (c. 5-15) speaks first, opposing the new religion and defending the existing forms of religion and philosophy. Does he act as the mouthpiece of Celsus or of Fronto? Perhaps of both, but, it seems to us, chiefly of Fronto. In the second part (c. 16-38), Octavius refutes the charges and vindicates Christianity as a rational religion. In conclusion (c. 39-40), Caecilius confesses himself convinced. The sun sets. Caecilius desires further instruction to be given him at a later day. Minucius is spared a decision. “Post haec laeti hilar-esque discessimus, Caecilius quod crediterit, Octavius quod vicerit, ego (Minucius) et quod hic crediterit et hic vicerit.”

The dialogue gives us an idea of the views held about nascent Christianity, both pro and con, by the cultured classes of Roman society. It is an orderly and compact summary of the pagan views of the time, confirming and voicing the arguments of both Fronto and Celsus.

II. THE HISTORICAL CONTENT OF THE SOURCES.

We now proceed to find the historical content of the sources, i. e., we will try to show about how much can be known about Nascent Christianity from the strictly pagan writers reviewed in the previous chapter.

A. THE PERSON AND LIFE OF JESUS.

1. THE NAME.—The name in general use among the earlier writers is “Christus” (*Xριστός*), the official title being confounded with the personal. Tacitus: “Auctor nominis eius Christus,”¹ and Pliny: “Carmen Christo.... dicere,”² both use the official title. Later writers, especially those familiar with the Christian scriptures, have the personal name: Jesus (*Ιησούς*). Celsus, who was conscious of the confessional significance of the name “Christus,” prefers to use the name Jesus throughout.³ The peculiar use of the spelling “Chrestus”, instead of Christus, in Suetonius⁴ is due, very likely, to an exchange with the Roman name Chrestus, as it occurs f. inst. in Martial 7, 55; 9, 27. We are reminded by it of a play on the words *Xριστός* and *χρηστός*, customary among the Christians themselves.

¹ An. 15, 44.

² Ep. ad Traj.

³ Origen C. C. 1, 28 and throughout.

⁴ v. Claudi 25.

⁵ Lactantius attributes the use of Chrestus to ignorance. Div. Inst. 4, 7, “Sed exponenda huius nominis ratio est, propter ignorantium errorem, qui cum immutata litera Chrestum solent dicere.” Suidas, under *Ναζαρεῖος*, says that under the emperor Claudius those who were previously called Nazarenes or Galilaeans, received at Antioch the name Christians. Cf. also Act. 11, 26.

2. PERSON AND HISTORY.—No full biographical account of the life of Jesus, as we find it in the Christian gospels, can be constructed from the scattered references to him in the pagan writers. Tacitus and the earlier writers had very meager information about him; what they ascertained, came to them by oral report, probably by Jews (Josephus), rarely from Christians. In Tacitus, we have the statement, “*Christus Tiberio imperitante per procuratorem Pontium Pilatum suppicio adfectus est.*”¹ We are thankful to have received so much from the pen of Tacitus; the historicity of Jesus is thereby confirmed by an author of repute and the time of crucifixion, explicitly fixed in the gospels, is corroborated. He was concerned to trace the origin of the new religion; and he found the originator to have been a certain “*Christus,*” crucified under the procurator Pontius Pilate. We have no evidence that Tacitus had seen any New Testament writings. It seems more probable that he knew of parts of the Old Testament, but even in regard to these he cites no sources. Owing to the commingling of the Jews with the Christians, Suetonius’ remark, “*Judaeos impulsore Chresto assidue tumultuantes Roma expulit,*”² sheds no light on the history. We do, however, gain a point of interest in Pliny the Younger. Pliny is the first to have perceived the religious significance of the person of Jesus for the religion. For Tacitus Jesus was the “*auctor*” of the new religion, in Pliny Jesus appears as being himself the object of religious veneration. He told Trajan that the Christians of Bithynia came together at stated times to chant a hymn “to Christ as to God”³ (*Christo quasi deo.*) Lucian makes the devotion of the Christians to Jesus an object of ridicule, drawing, as it seems to us, a parallel to Jesus in the person of Peregrinus, whom the Christians, by him deceived, honored as a god

¹ An. 15, 44.

² Suet. v. Claudi 25.

³ Ep. ad Traj. Cf. Lucian’s Peregr. (Peregrinus here).

ώς θεὸν αὐτὸν ἐκεῖνοι ἡγοῦντο). By way of transition and as a further illustration of hero-worship, he introduces Jesus. He called Jesus¹ *Τὸν νέγαν γοῦν ἐκεῖνον, τὸν ἐν τῇ Παλαιστίνῃ ἀνακολοπισθέντα* (that great man, who was crucified in Palestine.) “Him they honor (*σέβουσι*) for having brought these new rites into life” (*καὶ τὴν τούτην τελετήν*). Here Lucian chronicles history. In the 12th chapter of the Peregrinus, he deals with the Christians more explicitly. Jesus, he says, is the Christians’ first lawgiver (*νομοθέτης ὁ πρῶτος*), whom he proceeds to call “their crucified sophist” (*τὸν ἀνεκολοπισμένόν ἐκεῖνον σοφιστὴν αὐτῶν*); this very Jesus is to them an object of worship (*τὸν προσκυνῶσι* c.13). We have in Lucian, therefore, another confirmation of the historical fact of Jesus and his crucifixion; but, as for Lucian’s personal view, Jesus is merely one of the great *σοφιστῶν* and, after all, a deceiver.² Turning our attention to Celsus, chief of the antagonists, and to his successors, we must endeavor to glean from the bulk of their writings, (principally, as in Celsus, attacks upon the dogmas of the church), such statements about Jesus wherein they may be understood to have expressed matters considered historical by them. Celsus, of course, discredits the mass of gospel references, while he readily absorbs current fiction, when it serves the interests of his polemics. What then has Celsus to say? What is the historical Jesus, as portrayed in his Logos Alethes?—Jesus came from a Jewish village and was born of an humble daughter of the soil, who made her living by spinning wool—*ἀπὸ γυναικὸς ἔγχωρίου καὶ πενιχρᾶς καὶ χερνητίδος* (Cf. 2,32.) She was found guilty of adultery and cast away by her husband, a carpenter by trade. Thus abandoned she gave birth to a boy, the child of a certain soldier by the name of Pan-

¹ De m. Per c. 11.

² Lucian, in Philopseudes 16, calls a Palestinian exorcist *τὸν ἐπὶ τούτων σοφιστὴν*. Cf. Justin Martyr Ap. 1, 14: *οὐ γὰρ σοφιστὴς ὑπῆρχε.*

thera. The boy, later, went to Egypt and labored for a living. From the Egyptians he acquired the magic arts, so skillfully performed by him in his later career. Coming back to Palestine, he declared himself to be a god.¹ 1, 28, also 32, 38. John the Baptist baptized him. 1, 41, 58. Soon Jesus attracted to himself ten or eleven men of evil repute, publicans and fishermen, men of the worst kind. Traveling with them from place to place, he managed to get a miserable existence, 1, 62. The personal appearance of Jesus was δυσειδές, μικρόν, ἀγενές 6, 75.² He was a deceiver, (*ταῦτα θεομίσοις ἦν τύπος καὶ μοχθηροῦ γόνητος*) 1, 71, also 2, 7, 9. The Jews punished him for his transgressions. 2, 5. His prophecies failed to come true. Betrayed by his disciples, he became a fugitive and was finally captured. 2, 9. The soldiers reviled him; dressed him in a purple robe; placed a crown of thorns on his head; put a reed in his hands. 2, 34. He did not succeed in convincing his contemporaries. 2, 43—2, 46. He died 2, 72³ Porphyry seems to have treated Jesus with more fairness than Celsus. While he charged Jesus with equivocation and inconsistency on account of changing his mind about attending the festival at Jerusalem (Cf. John 7, 8, comp. with 5, 14), he by no means rejected Jesus, but considered him an eminent teacher of pure religion. He thought no one should calumniate Jesus; those, however, who worshiped him as God, were, he thought, deserving of pity.⁵ If he ascribed the cessation⁶ of public benefactions from the gods to the new Christ-cult, no aspersion on Jesus was intended. In his "Philosophy of Oracles"

¹ Celsus, though he was a man of considerable reading in philosophy, never saw the inner side of the Christian philosophy.

² Probably based on Isa. 52, 14,—53, 2.

³ Cæcilius in Minucius Felix, "Octavius 9: Qui hominem summo supplicio pro facinore punitum et crucis ligna feralia eorum cærimonias fabulatur, etc.

⁴ Jerome adv. Pelag. II.

⁵ Aug. De Civ. D. 19, c. 22, 23. Eusep. Dem. Ev. 3, 6.

⁶ Euseb. Prep. Ev. V.

(περὶ τῆς ἐκ λογιῶν φιλοσοφίας), fragments of which are preserved in Theodoret, Augustin, and Eusebius,¹ he recorded also oracles bearing on Jesus. The oracles were consulted as to the question whether Jesus should be worshiped as a god. These oracles, undoubtedly genuine, are tributes to the moral and spiritual preeminence of Jesus Christ, tributes spoken by pagan priests, who would not cast a syllable of odium on his precious and pure soul. “The wise man knows that an immortal soul ascends from the body, but the soul of this man is especially distinguished for piety ὅτι μὲν ἀθανάτη ψυχὴ μετὰ σῶμα προβαίνει, γιγιώσκει σοφίη τετιμημένος, ἄλλαγε ψυχὴ ἀνερὸς εὐσεβίη προφερεστάτη ἐστὶν ἔκεινον. In response to a question why Jesus had suffered death this oracle was given: “The body is ever subject to human ills; but the soul of the pious ascends to the heavenly places (Σῶμα μὲν ἀνδράνεστιν βασανοῦς αἱὲν προβέβληται· ψυχὴ δὲ εὐσεβέων εἰς οὐρανὸν πεδὸν ἔσει.) Hierocles, the last of the literary assailants, adds nothing to what Celsus and Porphyry had said. In the second part of his work “Truthloving Words to the Christians” (λόγοι φιλαλήθεις πρὸς τοὺς Χριστιανούς), with which Eusebius, in his refutation, chiefly concerns himself, he repeats what was probably a current slander from hostile sources; namely, that Jesus was chief of a band of 900 robbers.² He first drew a parallel between Jesus and Apollonius of Tyana, the magician idealized by Philostratos. By this means he attempted to detract from the glory of the life and works of Jesus and tried to minimize the moral effect of that life.

¹ Cf. Note 3.

² Lactant Div Inst. 5, 3. Hierocles is superficial. He probably confounded Jesus with Judas Gamala, Theudas, or some other Palestinian bandit.

B. THE CHRISTIANS.

1.—THE APOSTLES. References to the immediate disciples of Jesus occur first in writers already familiar with the Christian literature. Celsus is uncertain of the exact number, but is very positive in asserting that they were men of plebeian origin and of despicable character. He says, “δέκα ἡ ἐνδεκά τινας ἔξαρτησαμένους ἑαυτῷ ἐπιρρήτους ἀθρώπους, τελώνας καὶ ναύτας καὶ πονηροτάτους I, 62 II, 46.¹ Of their number one (Peter) denied, and one (Judas) betrayed Jesus. II, 17-18. All forsook the master in the hour of trial. II, 9. He accuses them of having invented the idea that Jesus predicted the outcome of his life, as they were not able to reconcile themselves to its disastrous issue, nor to give a reasonable justification of it. (*μηδὲν ἔχοντες ἐπισκῆψασθαι*) II, 13.² For Mary Magdalen, whom the gospels (Cf. Matth. 28,9; Luke 8,3; John 20,1) credit with the first vision of the risen Jesus, he has especially chosen epithets; *γυνὴ πάροιστρος-δνειρώξασφαντασιωθείσ-ΙΙ,55.* Similarly, he refers to Peter (though he is not named), in connection with Mary Magdalen, as a member of a band of deceivers. II, 55. These charges were repeated by later writers. Porphyrius called the disciples “homines rusticani et pauperes.”³ Commenting on Gal. II, 12-14, Jerome says that Porphyrius accused Peter of error and Paul of imposition. It seems that the social insignificance of the disciples was a fact rendering them especially unacceptable as teachers and writers to the pagan world. This feeling is voiced by Cæcilius in the Octavius, “Aequo indignandum omnibus et omnibus inodescendum est, audere quosdam, et hoc studiorum rudes,

¹ Matth. 4, 18; 9, 9; Luke 8, 3.

² Similarly Hierocles: *quaestus et commodi gratia religionem istam commenti sunt Lact. Div. Inst. 5, 3.*

³ Jerome Brev. in Psalt. also Joel 2. Cf. also his comment on Matth. 21, 21.

litterarum profanos, expertes artium etiam sordidarum certum aliquid de summa rerum ac maiestate decernere, de qua tot omnibus saeculis sectarum plurimarum usque adhuc ipsa philosophia deliberat.¹" Would ignorant men (indocti, impoliti, rudes, agrestes) solve the mysteries of the universe, with which philosophy had struggled unsuccessfully for ages?

2. THE CHRISTIANS AT FIRST CONFOUNDED WITH THE JEWS.— Such a syncretism is very marked in the early writers, especially in Tacitus. In his characterization of Jews and Christians, his phrases are sometimes identical, not merely synonymous. Of the Jews he says, "Apud ipsos (Judeos) fides obstinata, misericordia in promptu, sed adversus omnes alios hostile odium".² The Christians, executed in the Neronian persecution, are "convicti odio humanigenoris."³ He was probably led to identify them by seeing their common origin on the soil of Palestine. "Judea est origo eius mali (Christianity), for the originator of it lived in Palestine during the reign of Tiberius.³ Jewish customs and habits filled him with disdain and loathing; "Judeorum mos absurdus sordidusque;"⁴ but Christianity no less, for it was to him a "malum", and exitiabilis superstition,⁵ something to be classed with the "atrocias aut pudenda", one of the many vile things with which the city was invested.⁶ It is believed by some that Tacitus ascribed the essentially Christian belief of immortality to the Jews in his fuller description of Jewish rites and customs of Palestine: "Animosque proelio aut suppliciis peremptorum aeternos putant: huic generandi et moriendi contemptus."⁷ Suetonius makes the popular identification very apparent in his statement about the Claudian persecution, "Judeos impulsore Chreste assidue tumultuantes Roma expulit".⁸

¹ Minucius Felix Oct. 5.

⁵ Suetonius Nero 16-superstitione malefica.

² Hist. 4. 5.

⁶ An. 15, 44.

³ An. 15. 44.

⁷ Hist. 4. 5 Cf. Neander Kg. I, p. 88.

⁴ Hist. 5. 5.

⁸ Vita Claudi 25.

Suetonius probably copied the records of earlier times; in his own day the people had learned to make the distinction. Lucian says that Peregrinus was a prophet, a leader of the Christians' agapes and the synagogue.¹ This point, urged by some, does not seem cogent; besides, the word "synagogue" occurs James 2, 2, and may have been current among Christians of Jewish blood even as late as 165 A. D., when Lucian, it may be supposed, wrote the Peregrinus.

3. THE CHRISTIANS A MISANTHROPIC SECT.—The peculiar attitude of the Christians toward the social life of the pagan world was determined by the strictly monotheistic conception of God and the lofty ideals and ethics of their religion. They felt compelled to withdraw from the public and domestic life of the heathen, from their amusements and their works of art. How thoroughgoing their "world-flight" was, may be seen from the words of Caecilius,¹ "Vos vero suspensi interim atque solliciti honestis voluptatibus abstinetis, non spectacula visitis, non pompis interestis, convivia publica absque vobis, sacra certamina, praecerptos cibos et delibatos altaribus potus abhorretis". What an earnest pagan would call "honestes voluptates" did not appear in that light to the Christian of severer principles. Not merely the "praecerpti cibi" and the "delibati altaribus potus," but every form of pagan celebrations, theatrical exhibitions, processions, public banquets, were pervaded by the spirit of pagan feeling and religion. But domestic habits also experienced a change. Caecilius says, "Non floribus caput nectitis, non corpus odoribus honestatis; reservatis unguenta funeribus, coronas etiam sepulchris degeneratis." It is evident that the omission of these domestic customs in Christian families emphasized the contrast; especially, when we consider how inflexible custom is in all matters pertaining to funeral rites. Often the

¹ Por. 11.

² Oct. 12.

Christian contempt must have been expressed in a very bold way. Caecilius¹ says, “Templa et busta despiciunt, deos despunt, rident sacra, miserentur sacerdotum.” But these negative virtues made them appear in pagan eyes as haters of the human race. For did they not despise those very habits, customs, rites, in which human feeling most found expression? Was not their habit inhuman? That the peculiar manifestations of Christian living rested on an ethical basis, the earlier pagans did not discern. And the “odium humani generis” is probably the first² charge brought against them. Celsus devoted a considerable portion of his work to an effort to remove the antithesis by argument. Why should Christians avoid pagan altars, if God is omnipresent? What prevents those most consecrated to him from attending the people’s festivals? (*Tl oὐν κωλύει τοὺς μάλιστα καθωσιωμένους αὐτῷ καὶ τῶν δημοτελῶν ἐορτῶν μεταλαμβάνειν*; 17; 8, 21.) If the images are of no account, why cannot Christians join in the general feast (*πανθοινία*)? Either one should not live at all, nor walk on the earth, or he should feel a responsibility to take part in the established order of things, such as rendering sacrifices to demons. (8, 33). The nature of Celsus’ argument implies the charge.

4. A MENACE TO THE STATE. While every aspect of the Christian life, such as the social conditions of the people, imputed ignorance, misanthropic habits, the charge of immoral practices, etc., made the people and the religion undesirable to the Romans, some leading ideas of the religion itself may be shown to have caused the religion to appear also politically dangerous. Jewish messianic hopes were known to the Romans. Suetonius says, “Percrebuerat Oriente toto vetus et constans opinio, esse in fatis, ut eo tempore Judaea profecti rerum potirentur.”³ Tacitus already had made note of it, indicating the

¹ Oct. 8.

² Tac. An. 15, 44.

³ Vesp. 4.

source in the prophetic literature in the Old Testament, from which the idea sprang. He says, “*Pluribus persuasio inerat, antiquis sacerdotum literis contineri, eo ipso tempore fore, et valesceret oriens, profectique Iudea rerum protirentur.*”¹ If we recall the habitual mingling of the Christian with the Jewish people in pagan minds, also the fact that Christianity preached the advent of the Messiah, may we not assume that Christianity, as a religion sprung from Jewish soil, was supposed to perpetuate this hope? The ideal of a “spiritual kingdom,” as conceived by the Christians, could have been appreciated by an idealistic race like the Greeks; the Roman people, however, were disposed to take a more realistic view of it. The world-conquering trend of Christianity was recognized by them. To the Romans it was a political movement, a religion nourishing political ambitions. Christianity, moreover, proclaimed a world judgment with a disintegration of the existing order of things. “They fight zealously unto death,” says Celsus, not to deny Christianity, and threaten their enemies with eternal punishment” (8, 48, also 4, 79). These were “formidolosae opiniones”² in pagan eyes and to them particularly offensive. In addition to these ideas, the Christian contention that Christianity was the absolute, final and universal religion was understood. Celsus flouts the idea. “How could it be possible that the inhabitants of Asia, Europe, Libya, Greeks as well as barbarians, scattered unto the ends of the earth, could be brought to agree to one law (*eis ἡνα συμφρονήσαι νόμον* religion.) Whosoever believes it knows nothing (*τοῦτο οἴδενς οἶδεν δύδεν*)” 8, 72. He advises that “Christians would do better to assist the emperor manfully, to assume a just share of his burden, to take up arms for him and go to war in case of need, to lead the army with him (8, 73), rule the country if necessary, and do this

¹ Hist. 5, 13.

² Min. Felix Oct. 5.

for the purpose of preserving laws and piety", 8,75. For them to dream about a universal sway of their religion, he deemed detrimental to patriotism. But whatever objections to Christianity were entertained by the Romans, most concerned with it on political grounds, are summed up in the designation "foreign" (*illicita religio; supersticio*). To this point it will be well to devote a separate chapter.

5. JUDAISM AND CHRISTIANITY FOREIGN CULTS.—Polytheistic religions readily absorbed foreign elements. By this process Greek religion underwent considerable changes in the course of time.¹ Roman religion was more protected from the inroads of exotic cults upon it. It was an institution of the state, to some extent preserved by law. Conquered nations were permitted to retain their domestic gods, as long as Roman religion, as a sister in good standing, was given free course. Proselyting was not permitted. To introduce and extend a new religion without the consent of state, was considered inimical to the state's interest. Cicero² recalls an old law to this effect, "*Separatim nemo habessit deos; neve novos, sed ne advenas, nisi publice adscitos, privatim colunto*". As a rule, all polytheistic cults readily blended with the national religion of Rome; even Isis worship, so crude and exotic, gradually gained a foothold. These were, however, concerned chiefly about external rites and practices; their devotees could easily accommodate themselves to other forms. But Judaism and Christianity, strictly monotheistic in principle, and besides religions of authority, were neither flexible nor expansive. Allegiance to these presupposed personal conviction. They were proselyting religions, aggressive, and would not amalgamate with cults of different principles.³ The more unfavorably did their foreign character impress

¹ Dr. Waters in my notes.

² *de legibus* 2, 8.

³ Doellinger *Heid. u. Jud.* p. 612.

the pagans of strong national feeling and preference. Tacitus describes the character of Judaism, “Profana illic (in Palestine) omnia quae apud nos sacra, rursum concessa apud illos quae nobis incesta.”¹ Before his day, Cicero had voiced his feeling about the Jews and what was inseparable from them, their religion, “Stantibus Hierosolymis, peccatisque Judaeis, tamen istorum religio sacrorum a splendore huius imperii, gravitate nominis nostri, maiorum institutis abhorribat.”² Though special privileges were granted, from time to time, to the Jewish inhabitants of Rome, the Romans could not change their attitude. “Romanas,” says Juvenal, “autem soliti contemnere leges.”³ Jehovah, who could not save his nation from foreign subjugation, never was considered so potent as the immortal gods of Rome. “Judaeorum sola et misera gentilitas unum (deum) coluerunt, cuius adeo nulla vis nec potestas est.”⁴ Judaism remained a despised foreign cult, despite of its persuasive influence on many pagan minds.⁵ The odium resting on Judaism was soon shared by Christianity. It was regarded as merely a degenerate form of Judaism. Celsus sneers at it as a *βάρβαρον δόγμα* (1, 5). Judaism, he thought, might at least boast of its antiquity,⁶ but Christianity had arisen from *στασιάζειν πρὸς τὸ κοινὸντῶν Ιουδαῖων* 3, 117). In the same spirit, Tacitus rejoiced because Christianity had for a time been “repressed,” but regretted that it had again broken out (erumpebat),⁷ Caecilius asks, “Unde haec religio? unde formido? quae superstition est?”⁸ A “superstition” it was to Tacitus, to Pliny, to Suetonius—such it remained for many years.

¹ Hist. 4, 3.

³ Sat. 14, 96.

⁵ Doellinger, H. u. J. p. 628.
⁷ An., 15, 44.

² pro Flacco 28.

⁴ M. Felix. Oct. 10. Comp. Juvenal Sat. 14, 96. Orig. Cels. 1, 18.

⁶ So also Tacitus Hist. 5, 5.
⁸ Oct. 5.

6. CHRISTIANS A SECRET SECT.—Retirement prevailed among the first Christians. The times, fraught with many dangers for them, dictated secret methods. The fact never would have been charged against them, had not the suspicion that they might be politically dangerous invested their secret gatherings. Roman law forbade all nocturnal associations under penalty of death. We have an old law, reaffirmed in the *lex Gabinia*, to this effect: “*Sei queiendo urbe coitus nocturnos agitatis, capital estod.*”¹ Later, especial laws, forbidding political organizations of any private nature, were added, especially in 99 under Trajan. Pliny learned in Bithynia that the Christians had a custom of assembling for worship “*ante lucem.*”² He admitted that even the coming together of both sexes (*promiscuum*) in these meetings had proved harmless (*innoxium*); he stopped the meetings, because the time and private character of the meetings gave them the aspect of illegal *heteriae*. Worship was carried on in the utmost simplicity. They met apart from pagan temples, usually in houses, often in secluded places (*catacombs*) without pomp and display, often without altars, or visible insignia of religion.³ *βωμούς καὶ ἀγάλματα καὶ νεώς ιδρύσθαι φεύγουσι*, says Celsus reproachfully. Similarly, the heathen Caecilius, “*Cur nullas aras habent, templa nulla, nulla nota simulacra?*” (c. 10). This absence of the tangible offends him. He calls them a “*latebrosa et lucifugax natio, in publicum muta, in angulis garrula* (c. 8) *occultare et abscondere nituntur* (c. 10.) The work of making proselytes was, under constraint of law, carried on in secret (*κατὰ τὰς ιδίας οἰκίας* Celsus 3, 55). The charge of being maliciously secret about their missionary endeavors was not preferred against them before Celsus. He says that these

¹ Tab. IX.

² ad Traj. 96.

³ C. Cels. 8, 17.

tanners, woolworkers, these uncultured and rustic people, never ventured to make themselves heard in the presence of older and saner people, but put forth their persuasive efforts, when they could manage to assemble the children apart, or a few simple women. In the laundry, the cobbler's shop, the women's apartment, they spread their tenets, and they did it with great persuasiveness. C. C. 3, 55, comp. also 4, 23. Christians were accustomed to greet one another with a kiss.¹ The Christian stranger was at once received with cordiality, and the rights of a brother or sister were heartily extended. But these very tokens of a new fraternal spirit, purer and more genuine than was commonly seen, were interpreted to be signs of a secret order. “*Ocultis se notis et insignibus noscunt, et amant mutuo paene ante quam noverint,*” says Caecilius.² It is to be regretted that a wise secrecy, enjoined upon them by force of circumstances, was explained in their disfavor. With secrecy as a basis to build on, what wild rumors could not be evolved in popular feeling from the simple fact?

7. SUSPECTED AND ACCUSED OF UNSPEAKABLE CRIMES.—The fact of secrecy was pressed to become the charge of criminality. A summary account of these charges is preserved in the Octavius, all the more interesting because Fronto's speech against the Christian religion seems to be preserved here, if the statement, “*Id etiam Cirtensis nostri testatur oratio*” (c. 9, 6) is applicable to the contents of the whole chapter. “As evil is very prolific, the corrupt morals (*perditis moribus*) are already spreading, from day to day, over the whole world, and the well known, horrid churches of the accursed conspiracy (*sacraria ista taeterrima impiae coitionis adolescunt*) are flourishing among them a certain religion of wanton desires (*velut quaedam libidinum religio*) is here and there practiced; indis-

¹ φίλημα ἀγάπης, φίλημα ἀγιον Rom. 16, 16. 1 Peter 5, 14.

² M. F. Oct. 9.

criminally they call themselves brothers and sisters¹ (*fratres et corores*), so that ordinary unchastity (*stuprum*) is by the interposition of the sacred name rendered all the more vile (*fiat incestum*). In this way, their vain and mad superstition (*vana et demens superstatio*) glories in crimes.” Is it possible that the Romans, who had legally suppressed the practice of the lewd Bacchanalian rites (185 B. C.), suspected the revival of these in Christianity? Of the Bacchanalia, Livy² said, “*Ex quo promiscuo sacra sint, et permixti viri feminis, et noctis licentia accesserit, nihil ibi facinoris, nihil flagitii praetermissum, plura virorum inter sese, quam feminarum esse stupra.*” With regard to the latter, Roman law could deal with facts; but with regard to the Christians, idle gossipers could merely suspect similar crimes. But Caecilius tries to assure himself that in this case report could not be altogether astray, “*Nec de ipsis, nisi subsisteret veritas, maxime nefaria et honore praefanda sagax fama loqueretur.*” Celsus, it should be noted, prefers the general charge that Christians formed combinations contrary to law (*Συνθήκας κρύβοδην πρὸς ἀλλήλους ποιοῦνται παρὰ τὰ νενομισμένα.* Cf. 1, 1), that secrecy prevailed (*κρύψιον δόγμα 1, 7 ἀφανοῦς καὶ ἀπορρήτον κοινωνίας σύνθημα 8, 17*), but he does not make any charges of specified crimes. He had learned to discredit popular suspicions. The source of such excesses, Caecilius argues, is to be found in the religion itself. “*Digna et nata religio talibus moribus!*” Why? First, the Christians were reported to worship the head of an ass: “*Audio, eos turpissimae pecudis caput asini consecratum inepta nescio qua persuasione venerari.*” Tacitus³ ascribed such absurd rites to the Jews, and later they were supposed to have been practiced also by the Christians. We are in possession of a few graffiti, showing

¹ Lucian m., P. 13.

² Livy 39, 13.

³ Hist. 5, 4.

how generally these reports were circulated and believed. One of these is the graffiti discovered in 1856, in the ruins of the palace of the Cæsars, on the southeast slope of the Palatine Hill. This "Spott-



crucifix," caricaturing the fact of the crucifixion of Jesus, is one of a number of graffiti found scratched on the walls of the imperial Pedagogium. The inscription in Greek is barbarous, betraying the hand of some pagan boy. It is usually deciphered to read, "Alexamenos worships (his) God." (ΑΛΕΞΑΜΕΝΟΓ ΓΕΒΕΤΕ [σέβεται] Θεόν.)¹ A similar caricature was found on an antique gem, first published in the 17th century. On it is the erect figure of a man with the head of an ass, the body being clad in a Roman toga. A hand is raised to indicate the act of teaching. In the foreground are two figures, one standing, the other sitting, both attentively listening. Another is a coin containing the head of Alexander on one side and an ass with its foal on the other. The inscription is D N I H Y X P S D E I F I L I Y S,² translated by some, "Our Lord J. C., Son of God." Associated with

¹ Becker: Das Spottcr. der roem. Kaiserpal. Cf. Tertul. Ap. I, 16.

² Bennett, Chrs. Archaeology, p. 94.

these senseless rites was an even cruder form of nature worship, of which others accused the Christians. Caecilius says of it, “Alii eos ferunt ipsius antistitis ac sacerdotis colere genitalia et quasi parentis sui adorare naturam: nescio an falsa, certe occultis ac nocturnis sacris adposita suspicio!” An imputation manifestly drawn from the current gnostic theories! Third in order was the “offense of the cross.” A religion honoring a man punished with the highest penalty for his crimes (*hominem summo supplicio pro facinore punitum*) seems to him to deserve condemnation. In initiating neophytes, he says, the Christians have this custom: An infant covered with corn is placed before them. Somehow they are then induced to make thrusts through the surface of the corn, and the child is killed by hidden and secret wounds. The blood of it is then drunk by them with avidity, its members are torn from the body and distributed, and, by this “hostia,” they pledge¹ one another to secrecy. Finally, he approaches a matter known to all, as he says, and of which all talk: the common meal of Christians. “For this meal on the festival day (*sollemni die*) they assemble with their women, children, sisters, mothers, people of all sexes and ages.² When the meal has been protracted, the gathering has grown excited, and the fire of illicit desire in the drunken has been fanned aglow, a dog, tied to a candelabra, is, by the bait of a piece, provoked to leap beyond the space of his tether for an attack. The unconscious light being overturned and extinguished, they embrace, by unsteady lot in this immodest darkness, licentiously (*impudentibus tenebris nexus infandae cupiditatis involvunt per incertum sortis*); and, even if all are not by body, they are by conscience all alike lewd, for by the desire of all that is coveted which only single

¹ Catiline used human blood as a pignus coniurationis. Cf. Sallust *Catil.* 22. Dio Cassius 37, 30.

² Pliny *ad. Traj.* Lucian *d. m. P.*

ones can attain.” He concludes significantly, “*Multa praetereo consulto; nam et haec nimis multa sunt.*”¹ Indeed, it is enough!

8. THEIR MORALITY RECOGNIZED.—Few of the writers, with which we are concerned, knew the Christians by personal contact. Their feeling, determined by their associations, the prejudice of the people, and want of direct insight, was decidedly anti-Christian. Therefore, they readily believed or, at least, endorsed the rumors current about the new sect. In the course of time, the pagan minds became more and more enlightened as to the real character of the people, so generally held in suspicion: for even Celsus will not repeat the vile imputations carried over from Fronto’s time in the *Octavius*. As the Christian writings became known, the ethical precepts of the religion were recognized, though none of the writers would concede a priority of ethical truth to Christianity. Celsus repeatedly asserts that the ethical good in Christianity was anticipated and expressed in their own philosophers. Most favorable and appreciative of the moral parts of Christians are such writers as Pliny the younger, who had official dealings with them in his province, and Galenus, the physician, who would naturally be interested in the moral side of a new sect. Tacitus, of course, gives expression to the popular feeling in describing the Christians, “*per flagitia invisos;*” but even he must exculpate them from the charge of having burned the city, which charge was among the incentives to the Neronian persecution. In the latter instance, Tacitus was in a position to exercise his own personal historical judgment. He spoke what he knew to be truth. The greatest crime of which Pliny could find them guilty, was their attachment to a *prava superstitione* (*nihil aliud inveni quam sup. prav.*).

¹ Athenagoras confirms that these charges were actually made: *ἀθεότητα-Θνέτεια δεῖπνα Οἰδιποδελούς μίξεις.* Ap. 4. Cf. Tac. An. 15, 44, *per flagitia invisos.*

² Tacius Hist. 15, 44.

He personally investigated every charge preferred against them by popular frenzy, and, instead of finding them to be murderers, adulterers, etc., he found that whatever compacts they made bound them “ne furta, ne latrocinia, ne adulteria committerent, ne fidem fallerent.” The famous physician Galenus, who flourished about 50 years later than Pliny, has given us a very precious testimony for Christian morality. Galenus never hesitated to criticize the dogmatizing and ready credulity of Christians. He would not have allied himself with them as a school of thought. In one of his last works, he says that most people cannot be instructed by abstract teaching (*orationem demonstrativam continuam mente assequi nequeunt*): they must, therefore, be taught by means of parables. An example can be seen in the people called Christians (*homines illos, qui Christiani vocantur*), who drew their inspiration from parables (*fidem suam e parabolis petiisse*). Still, they live like philosophers (*Hi tamen interdum talia faciunt, qualia qui vere philosophantur*). Everybody, he says, can see how they overcome death. “Moved by a chaste feeling, they abstain from sexual impurities” (*item quod verecundia quadam ducti ab usu rerum venerearum abhorrent*). He proceeds: “*Sunt enim inter eos et fœminæ et viri, qui per totam vitam a concubitu abstinuerint.*” If this be virtue, it was beyond the reach of pagan philosophers! And, indeed, here was shown also a tranquillity of mind and a studious and conscientious sincerity that would do credit to any philosopher (*sunt etiam, qui in animis regendis coercendisque et in acerrimo honestatis studio eo progressi sint, ut nihil cedant vere philosophantibus*). This striking testimony of a fairminded physician controverts all rumors.

² ad Traj. 96.

³ quoted in Gieseler I, p. 122.

PERSECUTIONS.

1. During the Claudian reign, disturbances among the Jewish inhabitants of Rome must have been frequent. In how large a degree the new religion may have been the cause of these, we cannot tell. The contending factions certainly became a menace to the city's peace; and Claudius, finding the trouble serious enough to warrant legal action, by a special decree, in 52, expelled the Jews, at least the disturbing elements among them, from Rome. There is no reason why we should assume this decree to have been directed¹ against Christians also, although a number of Christians were affected by it. Cf. Act. 18, 2. This could not be otherwise. No distinction between the Jews, as a people, and the Christians, as a new party, was, as yet, officially made by the government. In Suetonius' account of the decree,² "Chrestos" is said to have been the instigator (*impulsore*) of the Jews. The evident misapplication of the name Chrestus Suetonius probably took from the records of the government.

2. The Neronian persecution was the first imperial persecution. It was the last tragic act of the burning of the city in 64 A. D. Tacitus,³ who was a boy of about eight years at the time of the conflagration, gives us the fullest account of the events. He says, "But not all of the relief afforded by men, nor the bounties of the emperor, nor the propitiation of the gods, could relieve him (Nero) from the infamy of being believed to have ordered the conflagration. In order to suppress the rumor, Nero, therefore, falsely charged with guilt, and

¹ Suetonius *Vita Claudii* 25.

² Dio Cassius 60, 6 Comp. Baur G. d. d. e. J. I.

³ Neander G. d. Ch. Rel. I, 1, p. 92.

punished with the most exquisite tortures, those persons who, hated for their crimes, were commonly called Christians. (*Subdidit reos, et quæsitissimis pœnis affecit, quos per flagitia invisos vulgus Ochristianos appellebat*). Accordingly those who confessed were arrested first. Next, on their information, a vast multitude (*multitudo ingens*) were convicted, not so much of the crime of incendiaryism as of hatred against the human race. In dying, they were made the objects of sport, for they were wrapped in the hides of wild beasts and were torn to pieces by dogs, or were nailed to crosses, or were set on fire and as the day declined, were burned to serve as nocturnal (*in usum nocturni luminis urerentur*). Nero had offered his own gardens (on the Vatican) for this spectacle, and also exhibited a chariot race on the occasion, now mingling in the crowd in the dress of a charioteer, now himself actually holding the reins. Whence a feeling of compassion arose toward the sufferers, although justly held to be odious, because they seemed to be cut off not for the public good, but as victims to the ferocity of one man.¹ The description by the greatest master of prose in that age is graphic and speaks for itself. The severity of the measures applied to defenseless Christians is not exaggerated; the literature of the time is not wanting in confirmation of the devices for cruelty made by the nation that invented the cross. Seneca,² the ill-fated teacher of Nero, describes such an "apparatus terribilis," which he probably saw applied to some unfortunate culprit. He says, "Cogito hoc loco carcerem, et cruce, et uncum, et adactum, per medium hominem, qui per os emergat, stipitem, et distracta in diversum actis curribus membra, illam tunicam, alimentis ignium et ellitam et intextam."³ Juvenal,³ the poet, has cast the same picture into the metre.

¹ An. 15, 44.

³ Juvenal Sat. I, 155.

² Seneca Ep. 14.

Pone Tigellinum, taeda lucebis in illa,
Qua stantes ardent, qui fixo fumant
Et latum media sulcum dedit arena.

The pitch-covered shirt (*tunica*) seems to have been more dreaded than the cross, or the pointed pole. He refers to it again.¹

"ausi quod liceat tunica punire molesta."

Martial,² the clever writer of epigrams, has a similar passage,

"In matutina nuper spectatus arena
Mucius imposuit qui sua membra focis
Si patiens fortisque tibi durusque videtur
Ab deritanae pectora plebis habes
Nam, cum dicatur, tunica praesente molesta
Ure manum, plus est dicere: non facio."

Remembering that we have here three authors, of whom Seneca represents the reign of Nero (54-68), Martial the reign of Domitian (81-96), and Juvenal that of Trajan (98-117), we may assume the use of the "tunica molesta" to have been long continued.

The Neronian persecution was probably confined to the city. An inscription, indicating a wider scope of the persecution, was found in Lusitania (Portugal), and was first published by Cyriacus of Ancora.

NERONI CL. CAIS AUG. PONT.
MAX OB PROVINCIAM LATRONIB
ET HIS QUI NOVAM GENERI HUM.
SVPER STITION. INCULCAB PURGA
TAM.³

¹ Juv. Sat. 8, 235.

² Martial X Epig. 25.

³ Orelli Inscr. v. I, No. 730.

Scholars¹ are unanimous in declaring the inscription spurious. The classic writers, at least, do not seem to know anything about provincial persecutions at this time.

Another description of the burning of Rome is given us by Dio Cassius, but he says nothing about the persecution proper. Suetonius does not enter upon the reasons for Nero's cruelty, but simply puts the punishment of Christians among the police measures adopted by him. "Afflicti suppiciis Christiani, genus hominum superstitionis novae ac maleficæ."² It must be noted that this persecution was not, as later persecutions were, carried on propter religionem novam de-lendam. The words of Suetonius must be understood as expressing a much later view.

3. No direct persecution seems to have occurred under the immediate successors of Nero. After the fall of Jerusalem in 70 A. D., a tax, known as Judaicus fiscus, was by Vespasian (70-79) and Titus (78-81) imposed on all Jews. Incidentally this measure affected Christians of Jewish descent. The persecuting temper again manifested itself in the person of the cruel Domitian³ (81-96). That the Judaicus fiscus was exacted rigorously now, we learn from Suetonius.⁴ "Praeter caeteros Judaicus fiscus acerbissime actus est." While Christian tradition speaks of large numbers⁵ that suffered martyrdom

¹ Gieseler I. p. 85, note 5. Mosheim H. E. p. 37 calls Cyriacus of Ancora a "homo, quod omnes sciunt, fallax, et si quis alias, male quis fidei." Orosius Hist. VII, 7, asserts that it extended into the provinces: "Ac per omnes provincias pari persecutione excruciani imperavit. Cf. Sulpicius Severus Chron. II, 28-29. Cf. also Rev. 2, 13 (Antipas).

² Suet. Nero 16.

³ Augustin in De Civ. Dei counts ten great persecutions: Nero, Domitian, Trajan, Antoninus (Marc Aurelius), Septimius Severus, Decius, Valerian, Aurelaius and Diocletian. Lactantius counts six.

⁴ Suet. Vita Dom. 12.

⁵ Eusebius Chron. 2 and Olymp. 218 says πολλοὶ δὲ Χριστιανῶν ἐμαρτύρησαν κατὰ Δομετιανόν.

under Domitian, the pagan sources record but one or two names of such as were persecuted possibly on account of their Christian views. These were the Emperor's cousin Flavius Clemens and his wife Domitilla. Dio Cassius¹ says, “Τὸν Φάβιον Κλήμεντα ὑπατεύοντα, καὶ περ ἀνεψιδὸν δυτα, καὶ γυναικα καὶ αὐτὴν συγγενῆ ἐαυτοῦ Φλαβίαν Δομιτίλλαν ἔχοντα κατέσφαξεν ὁ Δομιτιανός.” Because Dio Cassius states an unwillingness to honor the gods as the cause of their conviction, “ἐπηνέχθη δὲ ἀμφοῖν ἔγκλημα ἀθεότητος (ἀθεος-ό μὴ σεβόμενος τοὺς θεούς) they are generally believed to have been Christians. Of this we cannot be certain. Dio Cassius asserts “atheism” to have caused the conviction of many of the Jews, “ὅφ' ήσ (i. e. ἔγκλημα ἀθεότητος) καὶ ἄλλοι ἐς τὰ τῶν Ιουδαῖων ήθη ἔξοκέλλοντες πολλοὶ κατεδικάσθησαν· καὶ οἱ μὲν ἀπέθανον, οἱ δὲ τῶν χοῦν οὐσιῶν ἐστερήθησαν.” Perhaps they were Jews. Fa- bius Clemens was killed; Domitilla suffered banishment: ἡ δὲ Δομιτίλ- λα ὑπερωρίσθη μένον εἰς Πανδατέρειαν (an island off the coast of Cam- pania).

The succeeding reign of Nerva (96-98) proved humane. No persecutions are recorded. On the contrary, Nerva revoked the stringent acts of his predecessors, calling back the exiled, without regard to religious views and restoring rights and property. The same Dio Cassius² says, ‘Ο Νερόνας τοὺς τε κρινομένους ἐπ’ ἀσεβεῖς ἀφῆκε, καὶ τοὺς φεύγοντας κατήγαγε· τοῖς δὲ δὴ ἄλλοις οὕτ’ ἀσεβεῖς, οὕτ’ Ιουδαικοῦ βίου καταιτιάσθαι τινας συνεχώρησε. There is preserved a coin of the Roman

¹ Dio Cassius Ep. Xiph. 67, 14.

² Eub. Chron. 2 ad Olymp. 218 says of Domitilla Τολλοὶ δὲ Χριστιανῶν ἐμαρτύρησαν κατὰ Δομετιανόν. Hegesippus in Euseb. III, 20 relates how Domitian had summoned the grandchildren of Judas, the brother of Jesus, but dismissed them on account of their harmless peasant condition. Note. Christians were often called ἀθέοις. The imposter Alexander of Abonoteichos in Lucian Alex. 25 and 38 protests against the presence of Christians and atheists. Comp. the cry of Smyrna in Eusebius 4: 13—αλρε τοὺς ἀθέοις.

³ Dio Cass. ep. Xiph. 68, 1.

he inscription: "Fisci Judaici columnna sublata."¹ Cf. also end of Juvenal's 4 Sat.

4. Advancing to the reign of the emperor Trajan (96-117), we reach an epochal period in the history of the ancient persecutions of Christians. A storm of popular rage now swept over the church, and in its track followed the first legal enactment dealing specifically with the relation of the state to Christianity. The course of events is illumined by documents of first hand testimony, important in both their literary and historical aspects. The province of Bithynia on the Pontus was a stronghold of Christianity at the beginning of the second century. From 111-113 the younger Pliny received from Trajan the governorship over Bithynia and Pontus. Here many Christians were brought to him for trial. Trajan had, in 99,² given a law forbidding Senate, celebrating the revoking of the fiscus Judaicus and bearing "hetaerias,"³ clubs of fraternities, usually formed for political ends. Pliny had brought this edict to the knowledge of the provinces (*post edictum meum, quo secundum mandata tua hetaerias esse vetueram*); and the secret meetings of the Christians had brought them under suspicion of fostering such hetaerias. But Pliny was undecided as to the proper course of action; he directed a letter of official inquiry concerning the will of the emperor to Rome. The existing law against hetaeriae he had already applied; it did not seem to cover the situation arising out of Christianity. What was to be done? Trials of Christians occurred frequently, though the experience was new to him (*cognitionibus de Christianis interfui nunquam*). All especial edicts of Nero or Domitian (if any had existed) were abrogated since the reign of Nerva. "Nescio, quid et quatenus aut puniri soleat aut

¹ Ekhel *Doctrina Nummor Veter.* p. 405. Quoted by Dr. E. G. Sihler in my notes.

³ Pliny Ep. ex. 34.

quaeri.' Should he observe a *discrimen aetatum* between the *teneri* and the *robustiores*? Should any one be punished for having been a Christian (*qui omnino Christianus fuit*)? Should the very name (*nomen ipsum*) be a cause of punishment because of its being associated by the people with crimes? Some Christians were reported (*deferebantur*) to him, and he took this course (*modum*) of action: He asked them whether they were Christians (*an essent Christiani*)? If they confessed to be such, he repeated the question two or three times, threatening punishment. Those persisting (*perseverantes*) he executed (*duci iussit*). That a certain inflexible obstinacy (*pertinaciam certe et inflexibilem obstinationem debere puniri*) should be punished, he was convinced. Such as happened to be Roman citizens he sent to Rome. An anonymous indictment (*libellus sine auctore, multorum nomina continens*) was submitted to him. These people denied being or having been (*esse se Christianos aut fuisse*) Christians. Of the indicted, he dismissed those, who, denying that they were Christians, repeated the customary formula and sacrificed to the gods and the emperor's image "ture ac vino," and besides cursed Christ, which no real Christian could be compelled to do (*maledicerent Christo, quorum nihil posse cogi dicuntur, qui sunt re vera Christiani*). Their meetings, usually held *ante lucem*, he had succeeded in stopping on the existing laws against *hetaeriae*. In order to get at the truth, he deemed it necessary to apply torture to some of them; and he put on the rack (*per tormenta quaerere*) even the tender women (*ex duabus ancillis, quae ministrae dicebantur*), deaconesses, probably on account of their especial service in the church, the better to get at the real character of their religion. What rendered the situation worthy of official consideration was not the especially dangerous character of the religion, for Pliny says, "Nihil aliud inveni, quam superstitionem pravem et immodicam," but the extent of the movement and the fact

that people of all ages, ranks and sexes were being involved (*Muli enim omnis aetatis, omnis ordinis, utriusque sexus etiam, vocantur in periculum, et vocabuntur.*) As by contagion, the “superstitio” had spread through the cities (*civitates*), the villages (*vicos*) and in the rural districts (*agros*). He thought it was not yet too late to revive the “*religio*” and to arrest the further inroads of the “superstitio,” judging by his success in reestablishing sacrifice in the temples that had already been neglected (*certe satis constat, prope iam desolata templa coepisse celebrari, et sacra solemnia diu intermissa repeti pastumque venire victimarum, cuius adhuc rarissimus emptor inveniebatur*). The spirit of Pliny’s letter pleads for clemency from the emperor. If an easy expedient for helping the guilty to renounce the “superstitio” could be suggested, the mass might easily be corrected. Thus he concludes the letter: “*Ex quo facile est opinari, quae turba hominum emendari possit, si sit pœnitentiae locus.*”

The information we receive from Pliny is supplemented by the re-script from Trajan. This letter is brief, to the point, and in the spirit of the best lawgivers of the time. No Christians should be sought for arrest (*conquirendi non sunt*), a statement seemingly assuring to the Christians the right of unmolested continuance in whatever private persuasion they might entertain. It is, however, counteracted by the further stipulation that if any were accused and convicted they were to be punished (*si deferantur et arguantur puniendi sunt*). This clause made Christianity an offense contrary to Roman¹ law and punishable. It became officially stamped as a *religio illicita*, receiving not even the privileges granted to Judaism. The method of legal procedure also was prescribed. Relief from punishment should be granted to such as

¹ Baur, G. d. d. d. e. J. I. p 439 “So enthielt die Entscheidung Träjans, so wenig es ihr auf etwas direct Feindseliges gegen das Christentum abgesehen zu sein schien, das Haerteste, was ueber das Christentum verfuegt werden konnte.”

would avow they were not Christians and would confirm the affirmation by an overt act; namely, by invoking the Roman gods (*ita tamen, ut qui negaverit se Christianum esse, idque re ipsa manifestum fecerit.* i. e., supplicando diis nostris, quamvis suspectus in praeteritum, veniam ex poenitentia impetrat). The test was severe. It must have sifted the chaff from the wheat, wherever it was applied. With regard to the anonymous accusations spoken of by Pliny, the emperor determined that none should be considered (*sine auctore vero propositi libelli in nullo crimen locum habere debent*); he meant to advance justice and condemned them to be unworthy of the age.¹

5. Trajan's decree hardly ameliorated the condition of the Christians, though the emperor certainly meant to render justice to them and to protect where he thought injustice was done them. The decree seems sometimes to have been abused, naturally in disfavor of the Christians. Mobs sometimes clamored for the execution of Christians at the public festivals, for did not the law forbid that any one should be a Christian? Serenius Granianus, proconsul of Asia Minor, complained to the emperor Hadrian (117-138) of being besieged with "precibus et acclamationibus" by the people. The reply² of Hadrian reached the successor, Minucius Fundanus by name. Hadrian, in agreement with Trajan, condemned every illegal method of accusing the Christians (*precibus autem in hoc solis et acclamationibus uti eis non permitto*); if they (the accusers) could carry the matter into court and prosecute in a worthy way, he would not object (*ut pro tribunali eos in aliquo arguant, hoc eis exsequi non prohibeo*). If any one was really convicted of an offense against the law, punishment should be

¹ Pliny ad Trajanum eps. 96 and 97. We have no account of the martyrdom of Ignatius under Trajan by pagan authors. Cf. Euseb. History 3, 36.

² Originally preserved in Latin by Justin Martyr Ap I, 69 and translated into Greek by Eusebius Hist 4, 9.

meted out to him in proportion to his offense (*Si quis igitur accusat, et probat adversum leges quidquam agere memoratos homines, pro merito peccatorum etiam suppicia statues*). To stop the evident passion for traducing Christians, he wished those that were exposed as being mere vicious calumniators to be especially punished (*illud mehercle magnopere curabis, ut, si quis calumniae gratia quenquam horum postulaverit reum, in hunc pro sui nequitia suppliciis severioribus vindices*). That Hadrian especially favored the Christians, need not be a necessary inference for his letter. There is a tradition that Hadrian had temples dedicated to Jesus and intended to receive him as a god. Lampridius¹ says, “*Christo templum facere voluit (i. e. Alex. Sev.) eumque inter deos recipere. Quaod et Adrianus cogitasse fertur, qui templa in omnibus civitatibus sine simulacris iusserit fieri*etc. Spartianus, on the other side, makes us doubt whether Hadrian was at heart favorably disposed toward Christians. He describes him as a loyal Roman, desirous of preserving Roman institutions and unfavorable to foreign things. He says, “*Sacra Romana diligentissime curavit, peregrina (Christianity was among these) contempsit.*”² Let us admit that Hadrian allowed the Christians to enjoy whatsoever rights the existing laws granted them.

6. Since the history of the persecutions is the special content of Christian literature, growing fuller as Christianity became more and more established, light from the purely pagan sources is very dim. The reign of Antoninus Pius (138-161), for instance, was not entirely free from commotions directed against the Christians, but we are, for want of reliable information, obliged to pass over it in silence. Mark Aurelius (161-180) is known for his philosophical self-restraint and love of justice, but his sympathies were not pro-Christian. We pos-

¹ Lamp. *Vita Alex Severi* 43.

² Spartianus, *V. Hadriani* 22. Cf. also Vospiscus *V. Saturnini* 8.

sess a law given by him, consigning to exile all religious innovators and disturbers. Julius Paulus, one of the later jurists, gives it thus: “Qui novas, et usu vel ratione incognitas religiones inducunt, ex quibus animi hominum moveantur, honestiores deportantur, humiliores capite puniuntur.”¹ Modestinus, another jurist of the same time, says, “Si quis aliquid fecerit, quo leves hominum animi superstitione numeris terrentur, Divus Marcus huius modi homines in insulam relegari rescripsit.”² There is no direct evidence that this law was ever applied to Christians. But the times were such that it may be reasonably assumed. Celsus wrote his attack on the Christian religion at this time. He characterizes the Christians significantly as *φεύγοντες καὶ κρυπτόμενοι ἢ ἀλισκόμενοι καὶ ἀπολλυμένοι.*³ Religious impostors (goetae), invested the empire, and the ordinary pagan mind saw no distinction between these and Christians.⁴

7. The attitude of the rulers and the people grew more tolerant gradually, the mild in temper alternating with the hostile. Some of the most severe persecutions, systematically carried out, came as late as Decius and Diocletian. Christian literature gives full accounts of them; pagan literature records comparatively little. Commodus (180-192) may have been favorably influenced by Marcia, his concubine, who was herself well disposed towards the Christians.⁵ We have no pagan records of any persecutions under Septimius Severus (195-211), though the later years of his reign were not without them. In Alexander Severus (222-235) and his predecessor Elagabalus (218-222) we meet the remarkable syncretism, by which they blended Christianity

¹ Julii Pauli Sententarium Recept. V. Tit. 21, 2 quoted in Gieseler V, I.

² Quoted by the same.

³ Origen C. C. 8.

⁴ Polycarp (167) and Justin (166) suffered martyrdom in this time.

⁵ Dio Cassius 72, 4.

and paganism. Of Elagabalus Lampridius says, “Heliogabalum in Palatino monte inxta ædes imperatorias consecravit, eique templum fecit, studens et Matris typum et vestæ ignem et Palladium et ancillia et omnia Romanis veneranda in illud transferre templum, et id agens, ne quis Romæ deus nisi Heliogabalus coleretur. Dicebat praeterea, Judæorum et Samaritanorum religiones, et christianam devotionem illuc transferendam, ut omnium culturarum secretum Heliogabali sacerdotium teneret.”¹ So pan-religious a spirit the world had probably seldom seen before him; but his indulging the Christian religion was due to selfish interests, for he personally favored Syrian sun worship. The syncretism of Alexander Severus and his mother, Julia Mammæa, was less faddish, therefore more rational. Contrary to Septimius Severus, who in 201 forbade all defection from paganism to both Judaism and Christianity, Alexander Severus bestowed all privileges on the Jews and was indulgent to Christians. Lampridius says, “Judæis privilegia reservavit, Christianos passus est.”² In his lararium stood among others the statues of Jesus, Abraham, Orpheus and Apollonius of Tyana: “Et Apollonium, et, quantum scriptor suorum temporum dicit, Christum, Abraham et Orpheum, et huiusmodi cæteros habebat, ac maiorum effigies,” etc. He had the intention of building a temple to Jesus Christ: “Christo templum facere voluit, eumque inter deos recipere.” Besides he aided the Christians in acquiring property for religious uses, believing no better use could be made of public property: “Cum Christiani quendam locum qui publicus fuerat, occupassent, contra popinarii decerent, sibi eum deberi, rescripsit, melius esse, ut quomodocunque illic Deus colatur, quam popinariis dedatur.” The eventful reign of Decius (249-251), so disastrous for the Christians, extended over two years only. The governors of the various

¹ Lamp. Heliog. 3, 6, 7.

² Lamp. in Sev. Alex. 22; 29; 43; 49.

provinces had been commanded to compel all Christians to accept the national cult. The apostates are usually divided into three classes—sacrificati, thurificati, libellatici. One of the documents by which the magistrates attested the sacrifice of a former Christian, Aurelius Diogenes, was found in Egypt. Aurelius Diogenes wrote, “I have sacrificed to the gods regularly, and have done so now in accordance with the (imperial orders in your presence, have [eaten and drunk] at sacrifice and I pray you to certify to same. Farewell, I, Aurelius Diogenes, have submitted this.” Then follows the official signature: “That Aurelius has sacrificed, we affirm herewith. In the (first) year of the emperor Cæsar Gaius Messius Quintus Traianus Decius, the Pious, the Blessed, the Exalted; June 26.”¹ Merely a scrap of Egyptian papyrus, written, submitted and signed in the village of “Alexander’s Isle,” but a speaking testimony to the severity of the Decian persecution and of the persistence with which it was pushed into the villages of the distant provinces of the empire.

7. MARTYRDOM. The number of martyrs must have been very large. Tacitus already speaks of a “multitudo ingens”² that perished in the Neronian persecution. Had the number of those imperilled in Bithynia not been so large, Pliny would not have deemed the matter worthy of an official consultation with Trajan (maxime propter periclitantium numerum).³ Moreover, those indicated for trial came from every station and rank of society (omnis ætatis, omnis ordinis, utriusque sexus). Few names of martyrs are given. Dio Cassius⁴ mentions Fabius Clemens, who was executed, and his wife, Flavia

¹ Geffken, Christentum, P. 64.

² An. 15, 44.

³ Pliny ad Traj. 96.

⁴ Dio Cassius 67, 14.

Domitilla, banished to Pantatereia.¹ Some have thought Lucian's account of the death of Peregrinus to be a parody on the martyrdom of Polycarpus; the supposition, however, has been abandoned. Martyrdom in our sources can be seen in its broad outlines only.

The fortitude of the Christian martyrs usually impressed the pagans as a form of obstinacy. Cf. Pliny ad Traj: "pertinaciam et inflexibilem obstinationem." Sometimes the martyr spirit must have risen to a pitch of wild enthusiasm. The Stoical Epictetus says that the Galilæans acted ὑπὸ μανίας² (also Pliny-amentiae.)

With scorn Mark Aurelius traces their enthusiasm to sheer obstinacy—³ μὴ κατὰ ψιλὴν παρατάξιν, ὡς οἱ Χριστιανοὶ, etc. If the account of the death of Peregrinus by Lucian is purely fictitious, as Baur and some others believed, the description may be considered as voicing the current pagan view of Christian martyrdom. Lucian says,⁴ "I found a funeral pyre erected in a cavity six feet deep. There were firebrands in abundance, and fagots had been stuffed in that the pyre might be readily fired. When the moon rose, Peregrinus stepped forward, and with him the chief men of the Cynic sect, and in particular the distinguished citizen of Patræ (Theagenes, a Cynic admirer and champion of P.) with torch in hand, no mean assistant in the drama. Proteus himself had a torch in his hand. Several men came forward and lighted the pile in various places. The inflammable material was soon ablaze. Peregrinus laid aside his wallet, his cloak and his Hercules club, and stood there clad only in a

¹ Eusebius Chron. lib. II ad Olymp. 218 quotes a certain Brettios (others Bruttios) as his authority for the martyrdom of these under Domitian. Cf. also Jerome Epist. 86 ad Eustochium Virg. epitaphium Paulæ matris says Paula saw on the island of Pontia the little cells "in quibus illa (Flavia) longum martyrium duxerat."

² 4, 7, 6.

³ Medit. XI, 3.

⁴ de morte Peregr.

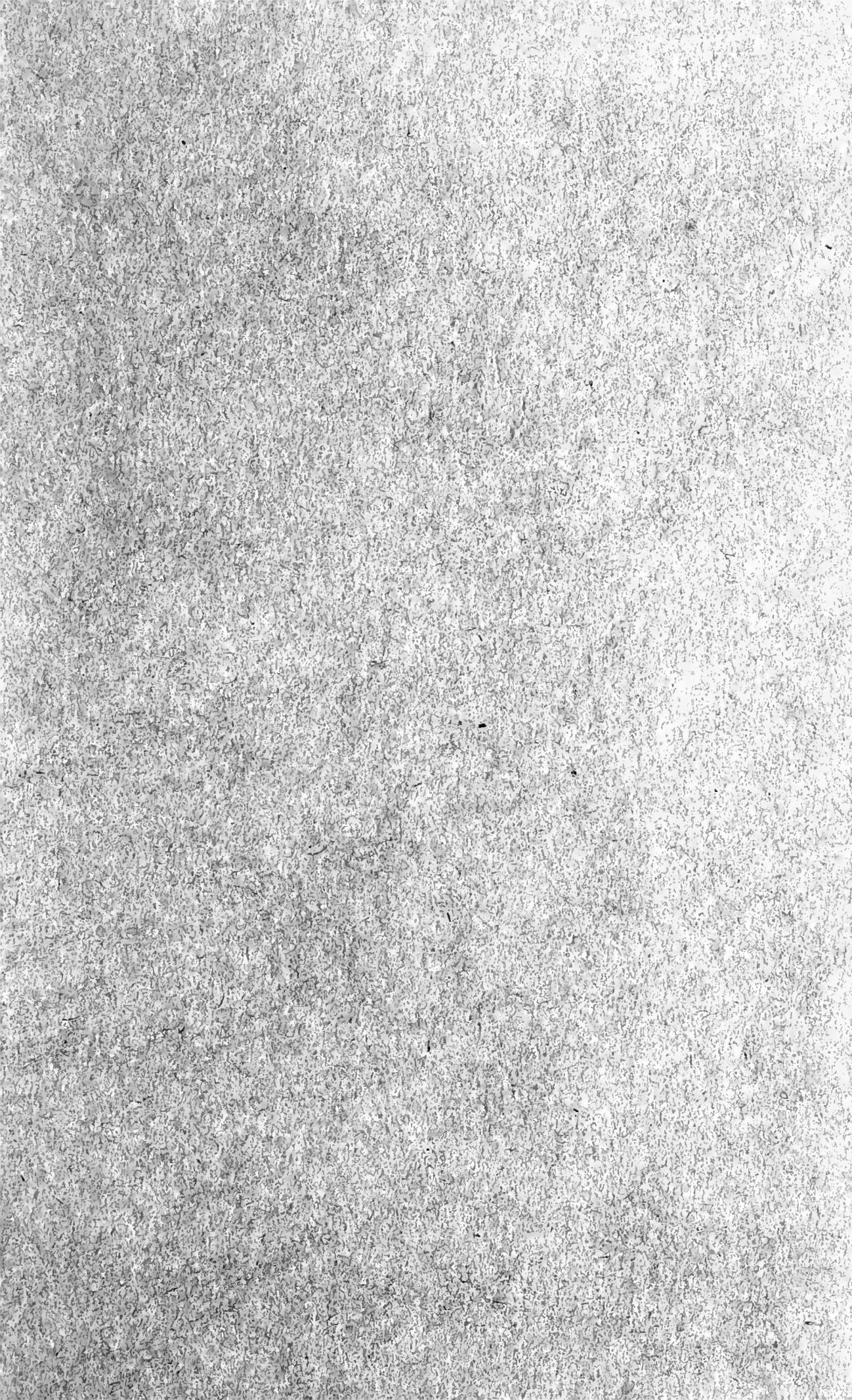
soiled undergarment. Then he asked for frankincense that he might throw it upon the fire. It was handed to him and he threw it upon the flames; then, turning to the south, he said, "O spirits of my mother and my father, receive me kindly." After this speech he leaped into the fire and disappeared from sight.¹ Some see^r in this account of Peregrinus an attack on Cynic philosophy rather than on Christianity. But we dare not overlook the fact that Peregrinus, though a deceiver of the Christians, is clearly described as having had certain traits in common with them. Lucian proceeds, "He was arrested upon this charge (of being a Christian) and was cast into prison, a proceeding which contributed not a little to the eclat of his subsequent life and assisted him in the chicanery and the thirst for notoriety by which he was actuated..... Peregrinus was released by the governor of Syria, a man who was fond of philosophy. The governor recognized the folly of Peregrinus and knew that he would gladly die if thereby he could gain notoriety; the governor accordingly released him," etc. His death should, it seems, be viewed in the light of this characterization. May it not be a parody on Christian martyrdom?

Sometimes, however, Christian fortitude impressed the pagan neighbors favorably and elicited commiseration, perhaps admiration, from noble spirits. Tacitus² admits the fact that a "miseratio" arose for the victims of Nero that were slaughtered not for the good of the state, but, as the people felt, to satisfy the ferocity of one man. The gentle Pliny, stern, even cruel under constraint of opposition and duty, as he saw it, cannot disguise a feeling of sympathy. Among Christians, the martyrs naturally were very highly honored. Libanius,³

¹ Gildersleeve Essays and Studies p. 350.

² An. 15, 44.

in his eulogy on Julian, says that those who preferred death to apostacy by some sacrifice were honored like gods by their coreligionists. Lucian describes the attachment with which Christians clung to their martyrs and assisted them. When Peregrinus was imprisoned, "the Christians," says Lucian, "took it severely to heart, did everything in their power to get him out of prison..... they showed him every attention. At daylight you could have seen them about the prison, old men, widows and orphans. Their chief bribed the jailer and slept with the prisoner in the jail. They carried him viands in profusion (*δειπνα ποικιλα*)..... some even came from the cities of Asia.....to aid him. They show an astonishing swiftness of action when such an action becomes known. In short, they spare nothing."



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